

Records of the Stolen Generations

Details

The fact that a child was Aboriginal was not often recorded in official welfare records. Aboriginal children came into 'care' under legislation specifically related to Indigenous people, as well as the broader child welfare legislation. Unlike some other states, in Victoria there was no separate institution for Indigenous children (although some places, like the Ballarat Orphanage, had a higher number of Indigenous residents than others).

Even if the records do not specifically indicate a child's Aboriginality, sometimes this can be established from other clues. A research project from October 1997 stated that a child's Aboriginal identity could be assumed with a knowledge of Aboriginal family names in Victoria and the locations where many Indigenous communities were formed. Another factor which might indicate that a child was Indigenous was the use of 'value-based dispositions' in the records, and value judgements that demonstrated little or no knowledge of Aboriginal culture in Victoria. For example, references to 'over-crowding' might be a sign of an extended family living in a household. Also, children who were judged to have been 'abandoned' were in fact in the care of extended families and community members. And, in many cases, the outright racist language in the files provided evidence of a child's identity. Here are some examples from files in Victoria:

'Aboriginal I believe, but extremely well-adjusted to white society' (doctor's report)

'Sleeps like an Aboriginal' (cottage parent)

'I am continually surprised by his nativeness' (cottage parent)

'The house was extremely clean for an Aboriginal house' (home visitor from Social Welfare Department)

'M's Aboriginal features can definitely be detected ... when she is smiling which emphasizes her wide mouth and full lips'

More info

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